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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0779
INFO RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 7980
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 9745
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 5765
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA PRIORITY 1054
RUEHSW/AMEMBASSY BERN PRIORITY 1372
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 1180
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 6470
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL PRIORITY 4252
RHMFIUU/FBI WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
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RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC PRIORITY
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [VZ](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: PEACE COMMISSIONER RESTREPO CHIDES CHAVEZ ON
FAILED HOSTAGE RESCUE

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Brian A. Nichols Reason: 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

11. (C) GOC Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo told the Charge on January 3 that Venezuelan President Chavez will continue to use the humanitarian exchange issue to create problems, but said the GOC plans to make him pay a high political cost for his recent unsuccessful hostage rescue mission. He agreed President Uribe should reach out to his Latin American counterparts to make the GOC's case on the hostage issue and would recommend that Uribe do so after the DNA test results on the child, the GOC believes is FARC hostage Clara Rojas, son, become available. Restrepo added that Senator Piedad Cordoba and Chavez have misrepresented the USG position on a humanitarian accord "suggesting the USG would negotiate with the FARC" and urged USG officials not to meet with her. He said the GOC will continue to engage the ELN on peace talks, but expects the process to go nowhere.
END SUMMARY

Failed Chavez Humanitarian Initiative Opportunity to
Further Erode His Credibility

12. (C) GOC Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo told Charge Brian Nichols and PolCouns on January 3 that in the wake of Venezuelan President Chavez's failed effort to obtain the FARC's unilateral release of three Colombian hostages, he saw little prospect of future progress on a humanitarian accord with the group. The GOC will continue to demand the immediate liberation of the hostages, and will push its "encounter zone" proposal for talks on an accord. The GOC will also harden its public discourse on the issue, stressing that the FARC are criminals and a humanitarian accord amounts to trafficking in persons. The GOC believes it has the FARC "cornered and confused," but does not expect this to lead to a breakthrough on the hostage issue.

13. (C) Restrepo said Chavez will continue to use the hostage

issue to create problems for the GOC. Venezuelan Foreign Minister Maduro, citing a letter signed by Clara Gonzalez de Rojas, mother of hostage Clara Rojas, called Colombian Foreign Minister Araujo on January 2 demanding the GOC allow Venezuelans to take DNA samples of the child believed to be Emmanuel. The GOC refused the request. Restrepo opined that the GOC needs to exploit recent events to make Chavez pay a high political cost for the suspended rescue operation. Chavez involved international observers in an ill-conceived, poorly planned mission. The international observers "believed in Chavez and Chavez believed in the FARC." Restrepo said the GOC thinks DNA testing will confirm its belief that the FARC does not have custody of Rojas, child, Emmanuel. The Prosecutor General's office (Fiscalia) will have the results of its test ready on January 4. The GOC also sent samples for testing in Spain. The test results would offer an opportunity to further erode Chavez, credibility.

¶4. (C) Nichols noted that President Chavez has worked aggressively to blame the GOC for the FARC's failure to free the hostages. The surprising revelations that the FARC might not even have Rojas' child Emmanuel had provoked disbelief in some quarters, while Chavez' echoing of FARC complaints of GOC military operations had resonated. CDA Nichols suggested that President Uribe engage regional leaders behind the scenes more actively to ensure that they understand the GOC's view point. Restrepo noted that the GOC does not want to encourage further international involvement in a humanitarian accord, but agreed Uribe should call his counterparts once the DNA results are released.

¶5. (C) Restrepo added that the GOC fears the December

letters from three U.S. Congressmen to FARC leader Manuel Marulanda, Chavez and Uribe supporting a humanitarian accord feed the impression that the USG might negotiate with the FARC. The GOC knows the USG has not changed its policy of not negotiating with terrorist groups, but Colombian Senator Piedad Cordoba and Chavez have worked to propagate this notion. Many Colombians, as well as international actors such as French diplomat Daniel Parfait, now believe the USG would be open to talks with the FARC. Restrepo urged USG officials to refrain from meeting further with Cordoba, noting she uses such sessions to inflate her political role and misrepresent the USG position. CDA Nichols observed that Department officials had only considered receiving Cordoba in response to a direct request from President Uribe and now that her sanctioned role had ended, we did not foresee the need to meet with her on this issue.

ELN Process Moribund

¶6. (C) Restrepo said the GOC will continue to engage the ELN to strengthen its international and domestic political positions, but does not believe these efforts will lead to real negotiations. The GOC has received indications the ELN will not respond positively to the GOC's mid-December offer to require only the ELN's Central Command (COCE) to concentrate as part of a ceasefire accord. He attributed the ELN's intransigence to its growing reliance on narcotrafficking and its fear of offending Chavez. The GOC estimates the ELN derives 75% of its funding from narcotrafficking, empowering mid-level commanders who oppose a deal because it would curtail their criminal activities. Restrepo said the COCE had hoped Chavez, facilitation role in the FARC and ELN processes would enable it to consolidate an alliance with the FARC. The GOC's suspension of Chavez, mediation efforts ended this ELN strategy.

¶7. (C) Restrepo added that while it has not received wide press coverage, the U.S. request to extradite four ELN members on kidnapping charges has applied useful pressure on the group. He noted that Columbia University academic Aldo Civico continue to work with the ELN on a funding proposal and peace plan, but voiced skepticism that Civico's work

would produce results. "Civico is trying to breathe oxygen into a cadaver," Restrepo proclaimed.
Nichols